



NRC NEWS

**UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, REGION II**

61 Forsyth Street SW, Atlanta GA 30303

Web Site: www.nrc.gov

No. II-04-041

July 30, 2004

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NRC PROPOSES \$24,000 FINE AGAINST WESTINGHOUSE FOR ALLEGED VIOLATIONS AT COMMERCIAL NUCLEAR FUEL PLANT IN COLUMBIA, S. C.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$24,000 civil penalty against Westinghouse Electric Company for alleged violations of nuclear safety requirements at its commercial nuclear fuel plant in Columbia, S.C.

NRC officials said the proposed civil penalty is based on a Severity Level II problem comprised of eight alleged violations resulting from the company's discovery of uranium ash deposits in a plant incinerator off-gas system that exceeded allowable limits.

The NRC said there were no actual adverse consequences as a result of the problem. The amount of ash would not have supported a nuclear reaction, or criticality, at the concentration and shape in which it was found. However, the agency said the potential safety consequences were "significant" because the company failed to establish, implement and maintain all criticality control systems as required.

The Westinghouse Columbia Nuclear Fuel Plant has no reactor but manufactures low-enriched uranium fuel for use at commercial nuclear power plants. A "criticality" accident at this type of facility would involve a sudden, localized "burst" of radiation in a production area inside the plant due to having too much fissile material in one place in a container of the wrong shape.

The NRC said the alleged violations were categorized collectively as a Severity Level II (the agency's second most serious) violation because, although no adverse consequences occurred, the factors involved collectively resulted in a significant increase in the likelihood of a nuclear criticality event.

NRC officials said the company has taken steps to preclude a recurrence of the problem and that Westinghouse has 30 days from receipt of the notification of the proposed civil penalty to pay it or to protest it, in whole or in part.

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